

MEMORANDUM

SUBJECT: Sino-Vietnam Border

1. There are border areas between China and Vietnam which the Chinese claim are held illegally by the Vietnamese. There are similar disputes over the extent of Vietnam claims to the Tonkin Gulf and the Spratly Islands in the South China Sea.

a. A Chinese diplomat [redacted] told an American official [redacted] that the Vietnamese hold Chinese territory [redacted] to a depth of several kilometers in some locations along the border. The Chinese diplomat added that the Vietnamese have constructed "fortresses" in these areas and noted that Vietnamese small units continue to penetrate Chinese territory.

b. In December, a [redacted]

Chinese briever said some Vietnamese defensive works and gun positions have been constructed as much as 380 meters within Chinese territory.

c. There have been references in Chinese media to a number of disputed areas.

1. On 4 January, China's New China News Agency said, "China's Punian (Pu-nien) hill and Puyingding (Puyingting) area before Youyi (Youi) pass of Pingxiang (Ping-hsiang) city are still occupied by armed Vietnamese personnel." Three hundred meters of railway line are apparently involved in this dispute. (See paragraph 3 below)

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(b)(3)
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2. On 25 December, a People's Daily editorial said, "Under various pretexts the Vietnamese public security personnel, acting unilaterally, have redrawn the demarcation line of the border areas in an attempt to forcibly change the status quo there." It added that the Vietnamese authorities are "nibbling away large tracts of Chinese territory." []

2. The 25 December People's Daily editorial issued a strong warning to the Vietnamese: "The Vietnamese authorities have gone far enough in pursuing their strong anti-China course. There is a limit to the Chinese people's forbearance and restraint. China has never bullied and will never bully any other country; neither will it allow itself to be bullied by others. It will not attack unless it is attacked. But if it is attacked, it will certainly counter-attack." The editorial continued that the incidents which have occurred along the border are "organically" linked to the Vietnam's "aggression" in Kampuchea. []

a. China's warnings and the military build-up north of the Vietnam-China border coincide with the Vietnamese offensive into Kampuchea, suggesting that Beijing may well intend to use the border dispute as a pretext to remind the Vietnamese forcefully that Chinese failure in Kampuchea does not translate into Chinese impotence. []

3. China closed the last rail link with Vietnam on 22 December, at about the time the Vietnamese began the offensive into Kampuchea. Beijing asserted that the rail line needs repairs along a three hundred meter stretch which China claims and Vietnam holds. []

a. The closure of the rail line has stopped the delivery of some Soviet and East European goods to Vietnam, forcing Vietnam to rely on sea and air shipments. []

b. There has been talk in Beijing's diplomatic community of a Soviet/East European attempt to impose some form of economic sanction on China's exports by rail through the USSR and Mongolia. []